European journal of American studies

11-3 | 2017
Special Issue: Re-Queering The Nation: America's Queer Crisis

Walking With the Ghost: Sodomy, Sanity and the Secular in Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*

Kyle Joseph Campbell

Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/11750
DOI: 10.4000/ejas.11750
ISSN: 1991-9336

Publisher
European Association for American Studies

Electronic reference
Kyle Joseph Campbell, « Walking With the Ghost: Sodomy, Sanity and the Secular in Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly* », *European journal of American studies* [Online], 11-3 | 2017, Online since 27 January 2017, connection on 01 May 2019. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/11750 ; DOI : 10.4000/ejas.11750

Walking With the Ghost: Sodomy, Sanity and the Secular in Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*

Kyle Joseph Campbell

> I love him with a virgin's fondness. His faults are virtues in my eyes,—but is he all perfection? Is he all that I desire? I would he were, and yet how irrational the wish, since though he were all that I desire him to be, he would not, in consequence, be more perfect than at present.
> -Letter to Joseph Bringhurst, Jr. from Charles Brockden Brown, June 9th 1792

1 An irrational wish, a desire for another man, virginal fondness—these titillating details found in correspondence between male friends might seem, to a modern reader, indicative of homoerotic desire. The ornate language might suggest that Charles Brockden Brown loved, and thus sexually desired, another man. This insight could strongly influence any interpretation of Brown's work. At the same time, some scholars would see this reading as anachronistic because it relies upon a modern romantic etiology that connects love to sexual activity. In *Overflowing of Friendship*, Richard Godbeer writes that "we cannot simply assume that men who loved one another must have wanted to have sex, let alone that they actually did so" (7). Yet to reject these moments of homoerotic potential outright is equally problematic. This raises a key problem for historicists, because to simply follow the groundwork laid by historians transforms the entire endeavor into a call and response form of discourse that reduces literature's role to mere mimicry. In response to the zeal of Fredric Jameson's call to "always historicize," Valerie Rohy writes, "The anachronism named as ahistorical is not bound... to an essentially conservative work of identification and self-affirmation; it need not project cherished values backward and repeat what we already know" (77). This potential within historicism reflects what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick would describe as a "paranoid reading," because "paranoia is anticipatory," producing a paradoxical temporality that informs the

past, present, and future. Paranoia, Sedgwick notes, labors to prevent "a bad surprise," which in literature can ultimately cut one off from new readings that exist beyond what is already known (130). This is perhaps the greatest bind for the historicist, as the methodology requires historical knowledge and insight, which can unintentionally blind an individual to new intriguing points of view that may exist outside of contemporary historical discourse.[1]

2

Queer theory has the potential to help address this challenge by offering insight into human sexuality prior to its perceived crystallization, unhinging the normal and cohesive historical narrative that is continually reproduced by society, opening up space for surprise in both literary and historic endeavors. In this essay queer theory will be key to understanding how Brown's novel *Edgar Huntly; Or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker*(1799) contains a homoerotic core that reflects a change in American society, as secular discourse required additional justifications in order to maintain the perception that the act of sodomy was unnatural and by doing so reinforcing what we today call heterosexuality. This transformation is key in order to understand how coitus evolved from an act of biological reproduction into a systematic arrangement of society and knowledge that normalized and produced the concept of sexuality in the nineteenth-century.

3

In this essay, I will argue that through somnambulism Brown explores a radical change in sexuality within the early American republic. Drawing on recent theories of secularism, I show how this plot device enabled Brown to explore a paradigm shift within society, using the automatic movements of the sleeper to both illustrate non-normative sexual acts and the mental illness to which they would be assigned. This reading diverges from most accounts of *Edgar Huntly*, which focus on the novel's engagement with themes relating to westward expansion and national identity.[2] It is by closely examining *Edgar Huntly* that this paper hopes to show a same-sex desire that is often side stepped in favor of exploring the homosocial dynamics that were being remade by political and social upheavals. Ultimately, it is the goal of this paper to show how Brown, through somnambulism, captures a grotesque transformation that was occurring within the early American republic. The nation's reconfiguration of sexual and social mores radically altered homosociality, which laid the groundwork for a new means to curtail and control male sexuality by making women the only *rational* object of male sexual desire.

1. *Edgar Huntly* and the Secular

4

In the last twenty years there has been a renewed interest in the early American republic in the fields of history and literature, which has generated new studies on Charles Brockden Brown. Brown's novels are often read for insights into the changing culture or political unconscious of the nation. Leslie Fiedler's critique of *Edgar Huntly* in *Love and Death in the American Novel* remains a key work in this field, and Fiedler's description of the novel as "an initiation story, the account of a young man who begins by looking for guilt in others and ends finding it in himself," continues to spark intense debate (157). One prominent discourse surrounding *Edgar Huntly* explores the narrative's engagement with the social and political complexities resulting from westward expansion

as settlers faced renewed conflict with the indigenous population. Paul Downes explores the multi-potential of the Indian figures of the story beyond the role of a gothic chimera by suggesting, "the Lenni-Lenape who inhabit Brown's gothic wilderness can be thought of in terms of aristocratic anachronism and primeval violence or as a testament to the persistent possibilities of the revolutionary impulses that had so recently been put to work on behalf of the Euro-Americans" (425). It is by focusing on the symbolic potential of the Indians that Downes illuminates the impact they had upon the narrative: their violent actions razing the fantasy of a peaceful frontier and raising political concerns surrounding what characteristics could be used to define a citizen of the American republic. After all, as Justine S. Murison explains, social elites of the late eighteenth-century were highly concerned with losing control of society, which is reflected through the automatic and unthinking movements of the sleepwalker. At the same time scholars also read the mechanism of the sleepwalker not as reflective of political turmoil, but instead symptomatic of unconscious desires for revenge or companionship that propel Edgar towards acts of depravity and destruction. The lack of readings that engage with the highly homoerotic aspects of *Edgar Huntly* seem odd then as Dana Luciano's and Kate Sugar Ward's scholarship explores the ways in which the novel both challenges and acquiesces to social and sexual norms, yet side step the potential of same-sex desire within the narrative by focusing on themes of friendship and reproduction instead. Even Stephen Shapiro, while acknowledging a reformation of sodomy from a forbidden act into a prohibitive identity in the eighteenth century, reads *Edgar Huntly* through a symbolic framework that understands Edgar's violence as indicative of an aggression produced by an internal conflict rooted in his sexual identity, instead of the somnambulism itself being caused by inordinate desires (232). In order to expand upon this scholarship, I suggest that we turn our attention to the historical, social, and sexual transformations that Brown observed. It is by taking into account how American society created new discourses to regulate sexuality in this period that we can see the ways in which historicism can create space for queer possibilities that are often thought of as anachronistic for the period.

5

Despite more scientific understandings of human sexuality prevalent in modern society, in which a turn to "natural," "biological," or "psychological" etiologies explain this drive, in the eighteenth-century sexuality was understood primarily through a religious framework. With God deemed the ultimate arbiter for social order and law, western society developed a wide range of socially acceptable and forbidden sexual acts. Perhaps the most visible symbol of abnormal sexuality was the sodomite, and, as scholars like Thomas Foster, Alan Bray, and Michael Rocke have shown, the sodomite throughout western history has provoked a wide range of responses.[3] Though criminal cases of sodomy were relatively rare in eighteenth-century America, the figure of the sodomite existed prior to the American Revolution and functioned as a symbol of social and sexual disarray. Often, the figure was endowed with an almost demonic aura that blurred the boundaries that separated the religious from the secular. In Thomas Foster's analysis of the 1751 satirical poem "In Defense of Masonry," he notes, "The charge of sodomy turned the image of the Freemason as manly participants in orderly civic rituals upside down" (182). This perception of the sodomite inverting the natural order continued well into the final years of the eighteenth century. Jonathan Edwards Jr.'s, 1794 sermon "The Necessity of the Belief of Christianity" directly addressed the issue of sodomy. In this sermon, Edwards denounces the Ancient Greeks and Romans for their acceptance of "unnatural

vices," which Edwards argues were supported by the state and social order. More importantly, Edwards's sermon illuminates a problematic ideological conflict of the eighteenth century by noting that the Greek philosopher Diogenes "was remarkable for indulging himself in the most abominable practices [of sodomy] openly," provoking Edwards' to speculate, "Does not the forementioned deistic maxim of the following nature directly lead to the same abominable practices" (1201)? While the sermon itself castigates the deistic cosmology, Edwards's insight points to a clear conundrum: is sodomy natural? Due to the nature of a sermon, we cannot know for sure how people responded to this provocation; however, this question makes apparent a need for a new way to condemn sodomy that was not justified entirely on biblical exegesis, while maintaining the understanding of the sodomite as an unnatural aberration. After all, if the secular world were to rely on the belief in nature as an observable truth, it would need a new way to police male sexuality that conformed to the rational worldview the Enlightenment had propagated, while remaining consistent with the social and sexual mores that existed prior to this intellectual movement.

6

With the rise of Enlightenment ideology in the eighteenth century, the role of nature in society was radically reconfigured: it became a new means to justify and normalize behavior. It is through "nature," then, that one can see both the need, and means, to reaffirm the status quo despite the period's claim to desire liberation from the arcane taboos that marred the Middle Ages. Joan Wallace Scott, drawing upon the scholarship of Talala Asad and Charles Taylor, captures this dynamic through her analysis of the French Revolution, in which she shows, how women were excluded from the public sphere. This development, Scott argues, was justified not by religious taboos, but rather by a belief in a "natural" weakness within the female body as eighteenth-century French discourse used femininity as the mirror for masculinity. By understanding women as *naturally* domestic and religious, French society could inscribe the male form with the trait of reason and give men a biological justification for their control of political discourse. "Nature" thus became a new discourse to reinforce the legitimacy of society that religion once maintained, which Scott explains was a result of secularism. "Secularists," Scott writes, "removed God as the ultimate intelligent designer and put 'nature' in his place. Nature was conceived not as an outside force, but as an essence that could be inferred from all living things, humans included. To act according with nature was to fulfill one's inherent capacities and, for humans, these were determined by sex" (28). Sexuality was not removed from this process. The "nature" secularism produced created and privileged certain types of sexual acts as natural, while categorizing acts outside of this framework as unnatural. This historical observation points us towards a larger conflict between social and ideological forces, which I believe are at the heart of Brown's gothic writing. Brown rejects the supernatural, relying instead upon uncanny natural phenomena, and thus his fiction inhabits the ambiguous boundaries that separate the rational from the irrational, the natural from the unnatural, the heterosexual from the homosexual. It is Brown's decision to highlight the ambiguity of the sleepwalker's body that allows us to scrutinize the actions and motivations that propelling these unconscious forms, while also showing society's response to these abnormalities, including its clear need to restrain aberrant individuals at any cost.

7

Madness, as a discourse, enabled the policing of sexuality by reinforcing the social taboos of the eighteenth century and followed the secular impulse to create laws

and norms that were guided by reason. John Locke's understanding of the lunatic as not lacking reason, but rather suffering from a distorted logic, provided the period with a theoretical schema to understand the sodomite not as a monster, but rather as a subject in need of reeducation. When writing on the nature of "wrong judgments" Locke notes, "But whatever false notions, or shameful neglect of what is in their power, may put Men out of their way to Happiness, and distract them, as we see, into so different courses of life, this yet is certain, that Morality, established upon its true Foundations, cannot be determined the Choice in any one, that will but consider" (281). What stands out in Locke's analysis of judgment is that his thinking reflects both a religious and secular understandings of reason, as well as a sense of a correct path in life, the defying of which reflects a lack of rationality. Whether it is "God" or "Nature," Locke explains that there exists an overarching level of "Divine Law," which in many respects meshes with a larger heteronormative paradigm within Locke's reasoning. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner define heteronormativity as "the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged" (548). Locke and his contemporaries, while arguing for this sense of an overarching natural law, codify and reflect a heteronormative understanding of social replication and order. Heterosexual coitus is understood as the natural sexual act, while non-reproductive acts are perceived as unnatural. Foucault made this point clear in *Madness and Civilization* writing, "if the eighteenth century perceived that there were among the confined—among the libertines, the debauched, the prodigal sons—certain men whose confusion and disorder were of another nature, and whose anxiety was irreducible, this perception was the result of the confined themselves" (224). The sodomite, though similar in some respects was different from the libertine and rake because while these figures may disrupt society and masculine norms, they were still understood as primarily engaging in natural sexual acts. Secular discourse thus clearly became a tool to reinforce, privilege, and normalize what we would today call heterosexuality.

8

Despite appearing anachronistic, this observation fits well with Attorney General William Bradford's argument from *An Enquiry How Far the Punishment of Death is Necessary in Pennsylvania* (1793) when it came to "crimes against nature" as he explained, "In a country where marriages take place so early, and the intercourse between the sexes is not difficult, there can be no reason for severe penalties to restrain this abuse. The wretch, who perpetuates it, must be in a state of mind which my occasion us to doubt, whether he be *sur Juris* at the time; or, whether he reflects on the punishment at all" (20). The "abuse" to which Bradford refers to is sodomy, and his reasoning shows why the crime did not merit the death penalty. But like Locke's belief in an overarching natural or divine law, Bradford's work shows a need to regulate non-reproductive acts to the mental landscape of the irrational, because to accept that a man would engage in such acts while of sound mind undermines the epistemological framework produced by the era. Thus in order to avoid addressing this potential Bradford projects the act of sodomy as lacking any reason or reflection and by doing so transformed the sodomite into the antithesis of "Enlightenment" and the enemy of rational thought.[4]

9

Sexuality is a highly contested discourse that in periods of social and political instability is fixated upon in order to displace social anxiety, and in the early American republic historians have noted an increased need to regulate and scrutinize deviant

sexual activity.Doron S. Ben-Atar and Richard D. Brown point to renewed interest in policing the boundaries that defined "natural sex" in the early American republic, as John Farrell and Gideon Washburn were sentenced to death for bestiality in the late 1790s though "there was no apparent social logic to these prosecutions" (5). Like the Salem Witch Trials that marred the end of the seventeenth-century, this renewed interest in policing behavior reveals a deeper social anxiety that manifested itself in a variety of ways. Cathy N. Davidson makes this deft argument in *Revolution in the Word* as she is arguing that novels became a vehicle to address the ways in which the American Revolution disrupted the domestic sphere. Brown was highly engaged in exploring and illuminating these tensions in his gothic novels. *Edgar Huntly* clearly addresses a wide range of social concerns, from relations with Indians to the characteristics required for the nations citizenry. At the same time, there is something highly sexual about *Edgar Huntly*; erotic depictions of male bodies, intimacy, and desire linger throughout this gothic tale. Furthermore, *Edgar Huntly* takes place not within the confines of the domestic sphere, but within a quasi-public wilderness. Edgar's rambles take place on the frontier of society and by doing so reflect an ever-present danger of the homoerotic existing at the margins of the homosocial. Edgar's somnambulism thus takes on greater meaning, as Sarsefield's intervention at the end of the novel not only cures Edgar of his sleepwalking, but also pathologizes and destroys Edgar's objects of same-sex desire. *Edgar Hunlty* thus privileges and normalizes heterosexuality as the natural form of human sexuality, making heteronormative acts the only rational choice in order to satisfy one's sexual appetite.

2. The Sleep of Reason Brings Forth the Sodomite

10

At the core of the somnambulist, according to *Edgar Huntly*, is a secret so dreadful that the mind represses it. Yet in sleep, when reason is replaced with dreams, the body reacts without knowledge and reveals aspects of this unspeakable truth that are hidden from the person's own consciousness. Sedgwick notes that the "unspeakable" in gothic literature, "was a near-impenetrable shibboleth for a particular conjunction of class and male sexuality" (95). Sedgwick's research focused primarily on English gothic novels, but it is possible to see a similar dynamic at work in *Edgar Huntly*. Edgar's encounter with the somnambulist Clithero is framed with such erotic depictions that it almost seems impossible to discount a homoerotic potential. *Edgar Huntly* begins as a story of revenge, as Edgar explains: "Methought that to ascertain the hand who killed my friend, was not impossible, and to punish the crime was just," pushing Edgar to search for this unknown assailant (7). His quest for revenge soon became an obsession, and Edgar returned to the scene of Waldengrave's death many times. The geography is described in a highly sexual manner: the phallic elm marking the location has such a strong influence upon Edgar that his "pulse throbbed as [he] approached it" (9). Stephen Shapiro notes, "*Edgar Huntly* fuses anatomy, geography, and knowledge about the secret place of homoerotic contact to idealize Norwalk as a fulfilling refuge in contrast to Edgar's Solebury home, named as the place where one's soul feels as it is enduring a living burial" (299). It seems no surprise, then, in this space so highly charged with homoerotic imagery, that Edgar would discover a human apparition, half naked and illuminated by moonlight.

11

This erotic setting seems appropriate for a gothic novel. However, Brown fixes Edgar's male gaze upon the unconscious body of another man by using revenge as a pretense to engage in this act of "Repeated and closer scrutiny" (9). Edgar's inspection of Clithero's form is so thorough that it hinges on voyeurism as he writes, "Something like flannel was wrapt round his waist and covered his lower limbs. The rest of his frame was naked" (9). Though Edgar does not see Clithero's genitals, as some fabric obscures them, his observations makes it difficult not to speculate that Edgar's gaze may have intentionally or unconsciously desired to see this piece male of anatomy. While my interpretation can be easily dismissed as a deliberate reading of a homoerotic subtext, we cannot ignore that it is clearly apparent in this moment of the novel. This scene seems extremely significant for Edgar, as his description of Clithero notes, "A figure, robust and strange, and half naked, to be thus employed, at this hour and place, was calculated to rouse up my whole soul" (9). What emotion was exactly aroused by Edgar's observation is open to speculation. Edgar never clarifies this detail, but it becomes possible to read his reaction to Clithero's male form as homoerotic when we consider that later in the novel Edgar's sleepwalking body searches for Clithero's form as if he wishes to embrace him. While conscious, Edward is able to track Clithero to a maze of limestone caverns, where he later mysteriously awakes after sleepwalking, as if some internal force propelled him to this location associated with Clithero. Edgar makes this desire to touch Clithero quite explicit when he first encounters him and is "prompted to advance nearer and hold his hand but [Edgar's] uncertainty as to his character and views" stops him for doing so (10). Thus the conscious Edgar is able to stop himself from touching the highly sexualized body of the sleepwalker Clithero, only to be later compelled to search for him while in the grips of somnambulism. Yet if this illness is caused by anxiety over some secret being revealed, we need to return to what I believe to be Edgar's original object of obsession and desire, Waldengrave, in order to illuminate how this phenomenon is connected to an anxiety tied to homoerotic desire and its revelation.

12

The impact that Clithero has upon *Edgar Huntly* is radical, and his appearance reshapes the narrative profoundly, but despite the rupture produced by this character we cannot ignore the fact that memories of Waldegrave are so powerful that Edgar describes them as "provocations and to remembrance and grief that I desired to shun" (78). This mourning, while perhaps normal, becomes suspect to the reader when we take into account the terror that Edgar experiences when his correspondences with Waldengrave disappear, suggesting a connection between Edgar's descent into somnambulism and whatever these letters contained. Kept "in a secret drawer," the letters were locked in a cabinet designed to be undetectable, concealed in a closet in order to protect Waldegrave's memory and Edgar from slander. While Edgar describes these exchanges as simply chronicling Waldegrave's philosophical evolution and his return to orthodoxy due to his engagements with Mr. S—, yet Edgar silences his role in this process and by doing so makes himself the receptive partner in this intellectual exchange. Edgar's irrationality, desire to conceal, and passive role make these letters highly suspicious, as if Edgar wishes to repress something inappropriate. While we cannot be sure if these letters described a tryst or merely chronicle a friendship, one thing we can determine is that they hold such emotional and psychic value for Edgar that he can neither destroy nor censor them. Edgar makes his inability to censor these document clear when he confesses that to do so

"would be to mutilate and deform them," an explanation that connects these texts to the body and memory of Waldengrave (89-90).

13

We can also suspect something illicit is contained in these letters due to the lengths to which Edgar goes to in order to conceal them. Fear pushes Edgar to hide them in his closet, which makes it difficult not see this choice as aligning with Sedgwick's own epistemological "closet." In *The Epistemology of the Closet* Sedgwick explains that the "closet" is not so much a physical space, but rather a way in which people are forced to conceal information about themselves in order to avoid antagonistic responses, repressing knowledge that is usually highly sexual in nature. Sedgwick writes, "Revelation of identity in the space of intimate love effortlessly overturns an entire public systematic of the natural and the unnatural, the pure and impure" (76). Edgar conceals these letters in his bedroom, an intimate space that Edgar and Waldengrave could have shared without raising an eyebrow. Thus when the letters are stolen it becomes easy to see why Edgar describes this development as "a supposition not to be endured. Yet ominous terror haunted me... This event so inexplicable and so dreadful, threw my soul into a kind of stupor or distraction" (91). The use of the word "distraction" is important here because the term in the eighteenth century was a euphemism for mental illness, which illuminates Edgar's own perception of his mental state.[5] If the "incapacity of sound sleep denotes a mind sorely wounded," the terror caused by the loss of Waldengrave's letters seem to be connected to Edgar's somnambulism; it is later revealed that Edgar while sleepwalking stole and buried these documents at the elm where Waldengrave died (11). While one can make alternative readings for the cause of Edgar's somnambulism, such as his parent's death at the hands of Native Americans, it seems difficult not to consider that some unspeakable homoerotic desire may be at the root of this unnatural occurrence. If we understand Edgar as having same-sex desires, then Edgar becomes a locus of what society designates as "unnatural," which explains the almost surreal experiences that follow his return to consciousness, when feminine symbols of nature lash out against him in an attempt to destroy this abomination.

14

"Nature," as this paper has argued, is not an organic and essential category, but rather the product of eighteenth-century discourse that reinforced the social mores of the hegemon. With this in mind, it becomes possible to newly interpret Edgar's battle with the panther he discovers upon awakening in Clithero's cave. This move to the cavern is one of Brown's own gothic innovation, as he transformed the womb like dungeon of European gothic novels into this natural formation. The dungeon, according to Leslie Fiedler, functions as way to illuminate that "Beneath the crumbling shell of paternal authority, lies the maternal blackness, imagined by the gothic writer as a prison, a torture chamber–from which the cries of kidnapped *anima* cannot be heard" (132). To Fiedler, the dungeon, or in this case the cave, is directly linked to the female body and makes this conflict symbolic of natural reproduction trying to destroy the sodomite who threatened this process. This scene is indicative of Abby L. Goode's concept of "gothic fertility," as the local ecology reflects the larger theme of political and social concerns over non-normative sexuality, which the sodomite, in this case Edgar, symbolizes (449-451). Edgar, tortured by his own natural cravings, is pushed to put "the linen of my shirt between my teeth," provoking him to "pondered on the delight I should experience in rending some live animal to pieces, and drinking its blood and grinding its quivering fibers between my teeth" (110). These cravings produced by intense hunger, which while

perverse by eighteenth-century standards of civility, are at the same time natural and show how basic impulses can radically alter one's behavior. This reading seems more plausible when we consider that after Edgar contemplates an act of self-harm, in order to draw forth his own blood, he discovers "the eyes of a panther" (111). In the clash, though, by chance Edgar is able to call forth the necessary energy, despite his fatigue, to "penetrate the scull and the animal fell, struggling and shrieking, on the ground," and thus kill the panther (112). The moment of victory was fleeting as "One evil was now removed, only to give place to another," because Edgar's hunger pushes him to turn to this slain feline as a source of nourishment engaging in a grotesque act of cunnilingus as he consumes raw flesh and drank warm blood to satisfy his appetite (112). This violation of the feline body is necessary because it provides Edgar with the necessary strength to survive the carnage that follows this surreal experience. My reading, while symbolic, captures the clear conflict between the natural world against forces perceived as unnatural by society. While we cannot determine if Edgar engaged in sodomy, it remains clear that he is at least a potential threat to heteronormativity. It is only by ensuring his incorporation into the structure of patriarchy that Edgar is able to survive this narrative. Marriage forces him to direct his sexual energy towards a socially acceptable object of desire, while placing him under the careful and scrutinizing gaze of the physician and patriarch, Sarsefield, his new father in law.

15

Marriage in the early American republic functioned as more than just a means of creating political, economic, and social unions; it served also as a means to control and regulate male sexuality, as it subdued selfish non-reproductive desires and directed men towards productive and rational sexual behavior. Marriage, according to Mark Kann, functioned as a way to regulate and ensure the proper replication of the social order that the bachelor and sodomite disrupted. In *Edgar Huntly* we see that with the return of Sarsefield, Brown not only provides Edgar with a male figure to emulate, but more importantly one who can provide him with the fiscal means and sexual access to establish himself as a patriarch. Scholars have noted that because Edgar lacked land and an income, he faced many difficulties in his venture to marry Mary Waldengrave. That is why, with the return of Weymouth and his claims to be the rightful owner of her inheritance, Edgar writes, "But wedlock is now more distant than ever," a move that Mark Edelman Boren reads as a part of Edgar's plan to end their betrothal (105). Boren's analysis is helpful, as he directs our attention to how Sarsefield not only provides Edgar with fiscal support, through his wife, but also hints towards a potential marriage to Clithero's former fiancé Clarice. Sarsefield makes this clear by noting, "[Euphimea] longs to embrace you as a son. To become truly her son, will depend upon your own choice and that of one who has the companion of our voyage" (175). While appearing benevolent, Sarsefield has an ulterior motive for bringing Edgar into his familial kinship: it would allow him to continue to regulate and observe Edgar's behavior. Thus Edgar must either choose to submit to the patriarchal social order symbolized by Sarsefield or forever be identified as an irrational unwed mad man who must be contained or killed. At the same time, as readers we cannot help but notice that Edgar's socially acceptable choices of marriage (Mary and Clarice) are either socially or biologically linked with Edgar's illicit objects of sexual desire (Waldegrave and Clithero). These women thus act as substitutes for Edgar's inordinate passions; their union would not so much erase his desires, but instead redirect them. This dynamic reinforces the social order and continues the reproduction necessary for Sarsefield's family and the nation state.

16

The reproductive realpolitik that flows through *Edgar Huntly* is a counter force to the homoeroticism that propel Edgar's actions, transforming this gothic novel into a conflict between rational heterosexuality and irrational homosexuality. This dynamic is made apparent as the distinction between Clithero and Edgar is continually blurred—one continually becomes a substitute and mirror for the other. From somnambulism to their shared bachelorhood, each man replaces the other throughout the course of *Edgar Huntly*, and their divergent endings illuminate Brown's insight into the changing social and political developments within the period. After all, as Davidson notes, while novels are not history, they are products of their time, and Brown has proven to be an astute observer of American society (365). Thus while many scholars have read *Edgar Huntly* for insight into the political realm, this paper has instead focused more upon the ways in which sexuality in the early American republic was being reshaped by a wide range of discourses unleashed by the American Revolution. What has interested this project, and thus diverges from other readings of *Edgar Huntly,* has been its use of secularism as a way to rethink madness as a secular way to control human behavior and exploring how this discourse was required to reinforce traditional paradigms of human sexuality. The sodomite diverged from this paradigm, as his object of desire was another man, which forces society to reconsider this apparition. Secularism as described by this paper points us towards a way to understand the sodomite as being reconfigured through a binary of rational/irrational and natural/unnatural by extracting the act and identity from the religious framework that initially produced it. This dynamic thus aligned the sodomite with irrationality and against nature and by doing so challenged "the Laws of Nature and Nature's God," which the nation had used to justify not only its formation, but also its rebellion.

17

While unable to predict the future of American society, Brown captures in *Edgar Huntly* the horrors of same-sex desire and the lengths a community would go to in order to ensure the sodomite would not become a natural figure in society. The homoerotic potential located in Edgar while absent in Clithero illuminates another disruptive desire that had to be restrained. Clithero's history notes Euphemia's command to "Keep your motives to yourself," which, while directed at different romantic transgression (loving a person of a different class), reflects another similarity that these two somnambulists share (38). Both men externalize repression as their bodies are compelled to move towards actions and movements that seem irrational in a society that requires uniformity and stability. Clithero in his search for the truth about the fate of Euphemia, reflects not the lack of reason that Locke suggested of the idiot, but rather the grotesque logic of the mad man. This is evident when he warns Edgar "if [Euphemia] be dead, I shall make *thee* expiate" (192). This exchange is what made Edgar exclaim, "Clithero is a maniac. This truth cannot be concealed" because his threat to Edgar not only attacked his honor, but the larger structure of American patriarchal society (192). It is by identifying Clithero, then, as the enemy of the rational man whose liberty is so dangerous that he must be exiled to the asylum that one can see a similar process at work in Edgar's own reconfiguration at the novel's ending.

18

Subtle in comparison with Clithero's dramatic end, Edgar's transgressions and ramblings though forgiven by the end of the novel result with an abdication of liberty and

agency, as he is placed under the watchful eye of the patriarch Sarsefield. Brown's ability to play with doubles thus captures the minute differences that separate Edgar from the life Clithero would have had in the asylum, for both would be placed, and would remain, under the surveillance of a physician for many years. In Sarsefield's account of what Clithero's life would have been like if he had not killed himself, he writes, "[Clithero] has saved himself from evils, for which no time would have provided a remedy, from lingering for years in the noisome dungeon of a hospital" (194). Brown's suggestion that the physician would be unable to restore Clithero to reason seems too peculiar not to be an unintentional interjection. It challenges the period's faith in the ability to treat the insane. What's more, Clithero's status as Edgar's doppelganger suggests that marriage might not restore and control Edgar's unspeakable sexual desires. Brown's suggestion that Edgar's homoerotic desires cannot be changed is a surprisingly progressive reading of human sexuality, destabilizing the cohesive heteronormative world of both his narrative and points to sexual desires that the early American republic wished to identify as insane.

19

While Clithero may die at the end of *Edgar Huntly*, his actions and choices save him from the tyranny of heteronormativity that demands all men to behave and conform or face the violence of the asylum. This insight brings new meaning to Brown's essay "What is Love?" (1800) that includes the telling line, "Love is often an error; an evil; it murmurs at obstacles that cannot be removed; it desires what cannot be obtained" (2). This is not to suggest that Brown was some repressed pre-modern homosexual, but rather that as an observer of human nature he is reflecting upon the early American republic's clear desire to regulate and control whom one could love, understanding that there exist numerous barriers to redirecting this emotional energy. Through *Edgar Huntly*, though, Brown is able to engage with a wide range of social, political and philosophical debates, as well as the tension surrounding human emotion and sentiment. Love propelled Edgar to search for both Waldengrave's assailant and for Clithero's body, but violence and turmoil only followed Edgar as he tried to embrace the men that he loved. Even in hindsight Edgar struggles to express through writing his complex experiences, and his letters produce multiple narratives, etiologies, and debates, making it impossible to create a coherent and unified narrative. At the same time, it is through the violence and chaos that Brown is able to engage with the larger question about love between men. Irrationality both conceals this same-sex desire and makes this argument possible. Some may say that my reading is anachronistic, but in my analysis I have pointed us towards a historical possibility that not only supports this reading, but also captures Brown's ability to understand the early American republic's need to secularize sexuality in such a way that it is removed from the state of nature and relocated within an empirical framework that was proclaimed "natural." The humor behind Brown's later essay "What is Love?" lies in the fact he pushes the framework of the scientific method to its logical extreme and by doing so satirizes the blind rationality that propelled conformity in the name of "enlightenment" and "nature." Yet it is in *Edgar Huntly* that Brown first explores this dynamic and instead of humor Brown finds pure horror. His gothic tale captures not only the dark potential that eighteenth-century sentimental friendship contained, but also the disciplining and restraining function of heteronormativity. For while Edgar survives and becomes a patriarch, we cannot forget that he was also *made* into a heterosexual. This transformation restrains and forbids a whole spectrum of human behavior, as Edgar can now only find emotional and sexual release in the arms of a woman. This development

makes Clithero's death all the more potent, as his suicide reflects a refusal to conform to this narrow perception of human behavior and sexuality. *Edgar Huntly* thus captures American society's violent response to those who defy this norm, forever identifying them as insane, while these lunatics, though exiled from society, maintain their sexual liberty in the face of enforced heteronormativity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ben-Atar, Doron S, and Richard D Brown. *Taming Lust Crimes against Nature in the Early Republic*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. *Open WorldCat*. Web. 5 Mar. 2016.

Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner. "Sex in Public." *Critical Inquiry* 24.2 (1998): 547–566. Print.

Boren, Mark Edelman. "Abortographism and the Weapon of Sympathy in Charles Brockden Brown's Edgar Huntly; Or, Memoirs of A Sleepwalker." *Style* 43.2 (2009): 165+. Print.

Bradford, William. "An Enquiry How Far The Punishment of Death Is Necessary in Pennsylvania." 1793: n. pag. Print.

Brown, Charles Brockden. *Edgar Huntly; Or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker*. Ed. Philip Barnard and Stephen Shapiro. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006. Print.

---. "What Is Love?" *The Monthly Magazine and the American Review* May 1800: 323–324. Print.

Davidson, Cathy N. *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. Print.

Downes, Paul. "Sleep-Walking Out of the Revolution: Brown's Edgar Huntly." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29.4 (1996): 413–431. *muse-jhu-edu.ezproxy.uvm.edu*. Web.

Edwards Jr., Johathan. "The Necessity of the Belief of Christianity." *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*. Indianapolis: LibertyPress, 1991. Print.

Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. New York: Stein and Day, 1966. Print.

Foster, Thomas A. "Antimasonic Satire, Sodomy, and Eighteenth-Century Masculinity in the 'Boston Evening-Post.'" *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60.1 (2003): 171–184. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Vintage Books, 2006. Print.

Godbeer, Richard. *Sexual Revolution in Early America*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. Print.

---. *The Overflowing of Friendship Love Between Men and the Creation of the American Republic*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009. *Open WorldCat*. Web. 5 Mar. 2016.

Goode, Abby L. "Gothic Fertility in Leonora Sansay's Secret History." *Early American Literatyre* 50.2 (2015): 449–473. Print.

Jefferson, Thomas. "The Declaration of Indepednece." 1776: n. pag. Print.

Jimenez, Mary Ann. *Changing Faces of Madness: Early American Attitudes and Treatment of the Insane*. Hanover, NH: Published for Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1987. Print.

Kann, Mark E. *A Republic of Men: The American Founders, Gendered Language, and Patriarchal Politics*. New York: New York University Press, 1998. Print.

Kant, Immanuel. "What Is Enlightenment?" Trans. Mary C. Smith. 1784. Web.

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. Peter Nidditch. London: Oxford University Press, 1975. Print.

Murison, Justine S. "The Tyranny of Sleep: Somnambulism, Moral Citizenship, and Charles Brockden Brown's Edgar Huntly." *Early American Literature* 44.2 (2009): 243–270. Print.

Rohy, Valerie. "Ahistorical." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12.1 61–83. Print.

Rubin, Gayle. *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. Print.

Scott, Joan Wallace. "Secularism and Gender Equality." *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference*. New York, N. Y.: Columbia University Press, 2013. Print.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985. Print.

---. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Los Angeles: University of California, 1990. Print.

---. "Paranoid Reading and Repartive Reading, Or, You'r So Paraoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You." *Touching Feeling*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002. 123–151. Print.

Shapiro, Stephen. "'Man to Man I Needed Not to Dread His Encounter': Edgar Hunlty's End of Erotic Pessimism." *Revising Charles Brockden Brown: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality in the Early Republic*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2004. 216–254. Print.

Wood, Gordon S. *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1992. Print.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank Elizabeth Fenton, Valerie Rhoy, Dona Brown, and Mary Burke for their feedback and support in bringing this article to fruition.

2. Some examples of this scholarship are Justine S. Murison, "The Tyranny Of Sleep: Somnambulism, Moral Citizenship, and Charles Brockden Brown's Edgar Huntly," and Karen A. Weyler, Intricate Relations: Sexual and Economic Desire in American Fiction, 1789-1814.

3. See: Michael Rocke, Forbidden Friendships Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Alan Bray, Homosexuality in Renaissance England (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Thomas A Foster, Sex and the Eighteenth-Century Man: Massachusetts and the History of Sexuality in America (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

4. Immanuel Kant in his essay "What Is Enlightenment" defined "enlightenment" as, "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed nonage. Nonage is the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance. This nonage is self-imposed if its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in indecision and lack of courage to use one's own mind without another's guidance. Dare to know! (Sapere aude.) "Have the courage to use your own understanding," is therefore the motto of the enlightenment."

5. See Jimenez, Changing Faces of Madness, 22.

ABSTRACTS

In the last twenty years, there has been a boom in scholarship on Charles Brockden Brown, most of which connects his work to social developments occurring in the early American republic. Brown scholars often read him as a man ahead of his time, as his writing addresses, hints at, or even inverts social mores. The scholarship around Brown's novel *Edgar Huntly* has concentrated on how the narrative addresses westward expansion and white settlers' relationship with Native Americans or the ways in which *Edgar Huntly* connects to Revolutionary society. Kate Ward Sugar engages with this narrative in a different way, exploring the dynamic of sleepwalking as a way to address male homosocial bonds. Scholars, though, continue to side step the eroticism within this narrative and the implications of somnambulism's status as a mental illness being tied to an unnamed desire. This paper addresses this gap in the scholarship by integrating a queer and historicist reading of *Edgar Huntly* to suggest that Brown's use of sleepwalking is done to reflect a social fear of the homoerotic. It is the goal of this paper, then, to explore *Edgar Huntly* as a narrative that weaves the danger of sodomy to sleepwalking, suggesting an implicit relationship between madness, illness, and same-sex desire. This reading of *Edgar Huntly* thus not only expands the scholarship on Brown, but more importantly the history of sexuality by pointing towards a social development currently unexplored by scholars of the early American republic.

INDEX

Keywords: Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Huntly, queer theory, madness, secularism

AUTHOR

KYLE JOSEPH CAMPBELL

Fordham University